The Thesis Committee for Joshua Morris Conrad
certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

Web Design and the Interpretation of Place: A Case Study in Austin, TX

APPROVED BY

SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:

Michael Holleran, Supervisor

Danilo Udovicki-Selb

Web Design and the Interpretation of Place: A Case Study in Austin, TX

by

Joshua Morris Conrad, B.S.

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Dedicated to my parents, John and Ruth Conrad.

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Web Design and the Interpretation of Place: A Case Study in Austin, TX

by

Joshua Morris Conrad, M.S.H.P.
The University of Texas at Austin, 2010

Supervisor: Michael Holleran

This thesis discusses and proposes a design for a new kind of web-based interface for the display of historical interpretation. The design, specifically for the interpretation of the now-demolished Texas Confederate Home for Men in Austin, Texas, uses this site as a case study to explore how original historical research can combine with and inform the design of a hypothetical open and dynamic on-line database of historic properties. The first half discusses the history of the Home's development, highlighting its significance as a relic of 19th century reform movements and social utopianism, while exploring how this relates to its physical isolation from the surrounding urban context. The second half discusses the scope of web-based historical interpretation and some conclusions about the limitations of current solutions. This chapter then discusses and proposes a series of web-based interactive diagrams illustrating the significance of the site's history identified in the previous chapter. The design attempts to bridge two competing desires in historical interpretation: the desire for rigorous yet static curated interpretation and the desire for an open non-curated data management system.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The goal of interpretive design, as this term applies to the field of historic preservation, is to efficiently and quickly disseminate information about historic subjects that one can not otherwise obtain by simply experiencing the subjects first-hand, and to make this information interesting to a general audience. Interpretive design is thus a form of information design, and more specifically to this thesis, information graphics, such as are signs, maps, diagrams, renderings, symbols, graphs and charts. Commonly, we also experience interpretive design in forms such as visitor's centers, wayside exhibits, tour guides, historical markers, and literature containing interpretive information graphics. According to the National Association for Interpretation (NAI), a "not-for-profit professional association for those involved in the interpretation of natural and cultural heritage resources in settings such as parks, zoos, museums, nature centers, aquaria, botanical gardens, and historical sites," interpretation is a "communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource.[1] In other words, interpretation aims to translate written historical analysis into other more relevant and accessible media for a wider range of populations. This thesis focuses specifically on the use of the

[1] "National Association for Interpretation," accessed September 18, 2010, http://www.interpnet.com.

Internet as an interpretive design medium.

For this study, I conduct a historical analysis of a non-extant historic site located in Austin, Texas, and propose a series of web-based interpretive graphics to illustrate the conclusions of the analysis. Instead of proposing an interpretive design based on existing historical research, I found that conducting my own original research and synthesis resulted in a more rigorous design in the end. The development of proper historical interpretation, I've learned, involves an intimate knowledge of both the subject matter and the historical methodology. By conducting my own research, I was also able to direct my interests into the areas most relevant to the needs of interpretation, namely, the significance of the property within a broad context of social and cultural history.

I decided to focus on a non-extant site particularly because I feel that these subjects are most in need of new interpretive ideas. For many non-extant historic sites, new development has prohibited any sort of interpretation to exist on the property. The accessibility and omnipresence of the Internet can bring these lost histories to light.

The subject of my historical research is the site currently known as the University of Texas Gateway Apartments, a student housing complex located at 1624 West Sixth Street in Austin, Texas. In 1972, the University constructed the Gateway Apartments as a married student housing complex to replace the Texas Confederate Home for Men, an 1886 Civil War veterans' home, which had become a general men's nursing home by the time it closed in the late 1960s. Though the University demolished most of the original home's structures, the form of the current apartment complex in many ways and for several reasons retains the form of the former veterans' home. In doing so, the

site illustrates several social and cultural connections between twentieth century public housing and nineteenth century veterans' homes and eleemosynary typology.

In the first half I discuss the history of the site from the development of the Texas Confederate Veterans' Home (1886-1942) to its evolution into a men's nursing home under the Austin State Hospital (1942-1972) and into its current state as student housing for the University of Texas at Austin (1972-present). I trace the history of the facility to its roots within the larger American asylum movements and the critiques of urban modernization that characterized many such utopic social experiments in the early to mid-nineteenth century. I use this historical analysis to argue that the current housing complex is an illustration of the connection between post-war student housing and nineteenth century veterans homes and asylums. This chapter is structured as a "visitor's guide" in order to illustrate the site's history alongside a narrative survey of the historic elements which still remain scattered around the property. This study also includes a survey of these remaining elements (see supplemental file). The "visitor's guide" structure is useful for this discussion because it acknowledges the intended audience: residents of the current complex, neighbors, Austinites, and those interested in the city's physical evolution.

In the second half I discuss the scope of web-based historical interpretation, how this field relates to information graphic design, and some conclusions about the limitations of current solutions. From this, I identify and discuss the historic site's statistical data with which I construct a series of web-based interactive diagrams illustrating the significance of the site's history that I identified in the previous chapter. The challenge with this design is how to illustrate

complex historical analyses through the use of thoughtful information graphics, one that takes full advantage of web interactivity including especially the core concepts of hyperlinking and pointing device interface. This web-based system acts as a prototype for the display of historical data for potentially any property and is intended to address the need of preservation professionals to effectively disseminate information about historical significance.

Chapter 2

A Visitors' Guide to the History of the Site

Because the University of Texas does not allow anyone other than residents, their guests, and staff to enter the property of the Gateway Apartments, this visitor's guide has a specific and limited audience. However, there is use in structuring a historical analysis as a site guide. In cases where properties might not have public access, or are too far away to tour, potential visitors can understand the salient characteristics by studying photographs, maps, diagrams, statistical charts, and written narratives of a site guide that explain historic events by linking them to descriptions of physical places.

The site of the old Texas Confederate Veterans Home is currently that of a student apartment complex owned by the University of Texas. Though the University demolished most of the original home in 1970 many elements remain as a palimpsest of its former use, including one building.[1] This site is particularly distinctive because of the distinct layering of recently constructed elements over older historic elements. In many situations on the site this superimposition is telling of the larger connections between previous and current uses. This site guide will treat the remaining building, the sidewalks, retaining walls, stairs, and other remnants as elements of an overall historic landscape that one experiences by moving through it, instead of by looking at it statically

[1] du Mont, "Texas Confederate Home Only History," *Austin American-Statesman*, Dec. 20, 1970.

with photographs or drawings. However, static images of the site in succession can effectively illustrate the connection between particular moments of the larger site experience.

In the visitor's guide that follows, the narrative jumps back and forth between formal descriptions of the site and the historical descriptions of the site that these elements illustrate. The formal analyses appear as italicized interludes and the historical sections appear un-italicized.

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The Gateway Apartments are located on the north side of a busy one-way street in West Austin. The property announces itself with an enormous building setback of several hundred feet that dramatically breaks from the dense urban streetscape along West Sixth Street. Only row of trees and a metal handrail line the sidewalk. A large sign on the side marks the entrance and explains that the University allows only residents and their guests to enter the property. The complex is otherwise un-gated.[2] *The buildings sit several hundred feet up the hill to the north. To the east of the entrance is an unused covered bus stop; the current stop is located just west of the entrance. Peeling off-white paint on the walls of the unused stop reveals several bright colors underneath.*

[2]Official permission to access the grounds can be obtained from the University Housing Department

Figure 2.1: Entrance to the Gateway Apartments on West Sixth Street

The University installed the currently unused bus stop in the early 1970s. At the time, it was decorated with a colorful graphic design by architects Barnes, Landes, Goodman and Youngblood (BLGY), the designers of the apartment complex. The University of Texas Board of Regents hired BLGY in 1969 to design the two hundred apartment units for married students currently located on this site.[3] In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the firm designed several structures for the University of Texas, including the University's Printing and Press building.[4]

The complex stretches the length of this block and extends north about two-thirds of the way to West Tenth Street. The remaining third of the property to the north contains the building and grounds of a Mental Health and Mental Retardation (MHMR) Infant-Parent Center. This facility however is only accessible from its own entrance on Tenth Street. Though the University owns the two properties as a single lot, a barbed wire fence separates the apartment complex from the MHMR Center. The whole site covers a hilly terrain and is defined on the northern and western edges by a creek which flows towards the south, eventually into Lady Bird Lake on the Colorado River. The northern edge of the site along West Tenth Street borders the neighborhood of Clarksville.[5]

[3] "Pop Art Stop," *Austin American Statesman*, July 24, 1973; University of Texas System Board of Regents Minutes, August 01 1969: 22; The University of Texas Project Management and Construction Services Department holds copies of the original construction drawing set for the Gateway Apartments as drawn by Barnes, Landes, Goodman, and Youngblood.

[4] University of Texas System Board of Regents Minutes, July 1974.

[5] Clarksville was found founded in 1870s by freed slaves. It existed as a thriving Black community until the late 1920s when city zoned peripheral black populations into East Austin as a solution to the expansion of the city into these desirable areas. In 2008 Tom

Figure 2.2: Entering the Gateway Apartments along the Main Drive

The main entrance to the site is, and has historically always been, from Sixth Street. From here the entrance drive makes a steady approach up to top of the hill. The topography of the site is in full view from this approach, with the array of housing units marking the various primary and secondary peaks of the hill. None of the buildings stand near the edge of Sixth Street; they appear as hill-side community, detached from the rest of the city.

Before 1970 there was a flagship structure located at the top of this drive that signified the center of the campus. In the same month as the establishment of Virginia's confederate home by the Robert E. Lee Camp of the United Confederate Veterans (U.C.V.) in November 1884, a group of Texan politicians and ex-confederates met to form the John Bell Hood Camp, U.V.C. for the purpose of creating a veterans' home in Austin. The election of Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876 officially ended the presence of federal troops in the last of the southern Reconstruction states, giving rise to the beginning of the Jim Crow era, and to the development of this new white supremacist and "Lost Cause" ex-confederate generation. Veterans' home historian R.B. Rosenburg writes that,

> The first homes were established during the 1880s and 1890s, a period of rampant ex-Confederate activity. In these two decades, at the same time that southerners organized and dedicated themselves to unveil monuments, write regimental histories, decorate cemeteries, preserve battlefields, and participate in reunion rituals

Barnett compiled a short oral history of the effect that the Confederate veterans' home had on the community of Clarksville, entitled Sirens and Symbols: Clarksville Residents Reflect on the Texas Confederate Home.

— all in an effort to preserve the memory of Johnny Reb — a viable and discernible soldiers' home "movement" developed.[6]

The Texas camp established the constitution and by-laws of the John B. Hood Camp based on those of the Virginia camp. In July 1886 the Hood Camp was able to raise enough money to purchase a seven-room residence sited prominently atop a fifteen-acre hillside property outside of Austin. At the time, the area here was undeveloped and lay outside the city. It comprised a low density scattering of homes on large lots, as well as the small developing town of Clarksville immediately to the north. The privately funded Hood camp managed the home during the first few years of operation until the state legislature passed a bill in March 1891 to acquire the land from the Hood Camp and establish a Board of Managers to administer the Home. At this point the property became known as the Texas Confederate Home. Over the next decades a building campaign developed the site into a complex of a dozen buildings.[7]

In 1886 the founders of the veterans' home constructed the the flagship administration building for the institution. It is unclear if they reused any or all of the the original house but by 1894 photographs show that they had built a three-story brick structure with a two-story tower positioned on center and rising up from the front roof.[8] The tower was the house's most prominent feature. It contained a pitched pyramidal roof with deep eaves leading up to a tall flagpole from which the home flew a Confederate flag.[9] The top row of

[6]Rosenburg, , *Living Monuments: Confederate Soldiers' Homes in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993): 3.

[7]Rosenburg, 32-34, 46-7, 91, 134.

[8]Photograph #PICA 04332, Austin History Center, dated 1891.

[9]The Texas Confederate Museum at the Civil War Museum in Fort Worth currently owns a flag flown from the home, as well as numerous other ephemera and memorabilia.

windows of the tower contained unglazed arched openings, while the bottom row contained glazed and only slightly arched windows. The slightly arched windows repeated throughout the front façade of the building but a full two-story wood-frame porch –extended to three stories by the 1921 – covered most of this elevation.[10] A wide grand entry stairway led up to the main *piano nobile* of the porch and house. Decorative wooden brackets and porch railings framed this story. The house as a whole took its form from the Stick Style popular in residential architecture after the Civil War until the 1890s, with Italianate features in the tower. The Home also planted Live Oak shade trees around the front yard of the building, two of which still remain today.

The hillside landscape of the current Gateway Apartment complex is lined with two to three story flat-roof apartment blocks, clad in brick with minimal details. During the approach into the complex only three or four of them are visible at one time. They are positioned both at the tops and the bottoms of the hill sides. The most visible building during this approach sits atop the most steeply sloped hill side. The slope leading down from this building is completely paved in concrete as a solution to erosion issues. This manipulation of the hillside contrasts greatly with short rubble walls that retain the sloping sides of the main drive. They are half dry stacked, half mortared at points where they need the help, with splashes of concrete laid as coping. The visual effect of these old walls is significant to the experience of the site. Whereas the buildings and the concrete hillside are clean and Modern (though themselves already dated), the stone walls evoke an older architectural aesthetic. There is a composition of new and old, of layers of different eras through which the whole landscape has

[10]Photograph #CO3262, Austin History Center, dated 6/3/1921.

Figure 2.3: A building and concrete retaining wall in the Gateway Apartment complex

transformed. The older elements, which include stone walls, stairs, and paths, are scattered throughout the entire apartment complex. It is rare to find a spot where one does not experience this juxtaposition.

The experience of the site, however, depends on what the viewer is doing there. Most of the population is either residents or maintenance staff. In fact it is against the University's policy for anyone other than these people and their guests to enter the site. Depending on their destination in the complex, the viewer could possibly take one of a number of routes through the site, though there is only one entrance to the complex. All these various routes spur off of the main drive and wind around the housing blocks. The blocks do not align in any orthogonal manner with each other, but rather they group to create a series of communal courtyards and sit on the hillside so as to produce pleasing views to and from the apartment units.

Behind the main building, the Home constructed an attached two-story dining hall and kitchen. This served as the center of life for the complex, both socially and architecturally; the dining hall faced at the head of a series of well-landscaped courtyard spaces that extended to the north behind the administration building. A series of barrack-style one to two-story housing units surrounded these open spaces, all of which faced inward with screened-in porches and benches. Further to the north, a hospital building enclosed the inner courtyards, and beyond this to the north the Home constructed a simple cruciform-plan church building. Architect C.H. Page designed many of these structures, including the dining hall and the original hospital building in 1901. Steep slopes surrounded practically every side of the complex outside of the housing units; only the main driveway from Sixth Street fed to these buildings.

To the west, down the hill at the edge of the property near the creek were a series of single detached employee housing units with their own driveway.[11]

The isolation of this site as a picturesque hill-side community is a characteristic of this place that has continued since the construction of the original veterans' home here at the end of the nineteenth century. The form of the original home was itself responding to a national discussion about the proper structure and form of a new veterans' home typology that emerged in the United States after the Civil War . Though there existed forms of veterans' homes in the U.S. prior to the war, the first national home open to all veterans, and the forerunner of today's Veterans' Administration Hospital system was the National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, signed into law by the administration of President Lincoln after the Civil War in 1865. However, they did not allow confederate veterans.[12]

All of the 1970s buildings express the same essential rectilinear massing and brick/stucco material scheme. They vary between two and three stories and contain open-air stair wells and balconies that project out of the brick-clad building mass. On these exterior brick walls a course of upright bricks at the floor plates break up an otherwise undecorated wall, and dark brown metal coping top the walls at the edge of the flat roof. The railings of the stair wells and balconies are faced in light beige stucco finished with a hand-combed texture. The overall expression is minimal in style, and this, in addition to a

[11]See the 1935 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of the property, as well as photographs at the Austin History Center and the Texas State Archives; the Texas State Archive also holds blueprints of the C.H. Page designs for the Home, as well as the Confederate Woman's Home in Hyde Park.

[12]Cetina, *A History of Veterans' Home in the United States, 1811-1930* (dissertation, Case Western, 1977), 84-103..

Figure 2.4: A typical building in the Gateway Apartment complex

color palette composed of various browns and beiges, all lend to its association with the architectural fashion of the 1960s and 70s, particularly with the styles of efficiency apartment complexes built at the time around Austin.

However, instead of fitting into small lots in old neighborhoods around the city as many apartment complexes do, these buildings spread out over a dynamic hillside terrain. The spaces between buildings are casual to the point of being residual; they are not formally arranged but still are well maintained by the grounds crew. Mostly they are grassy open spaces with a few old oak shade trees. Sidewalks lead people from parking areas to buildings, sometimes utilizing some of the old stairs and walls. As one walks further into the site, from Sixth Street up to the top of the hill, the proximity of one building to another decreases to the point where only the width of a sidewalk separates some buildings. This progression evokes a feeling of moving "deeper" towards the center of the complex.

At first American veterans' homes referred to themselves as asylums because they emerged from the architecture and planning of the state mental hospital movement which had begun in the mid-1840s and was still growing in popularity throughout the late nineteenth century. When discussing the selection of sites for the National Asylum, the Board of Managers listed criteria such as a location at least three miles from a city, proximity to a railroad, a property of at least 200 acres, and access to fresh water. These criteria mirror those concerning site selection and land size developed for state mental hospitals by the Association of Medical Superintendents of American Institutions for the Insane (AMSAII) in the late 1840s and formally published by Thomas Kirkbride in 1854 in his influential text *On the Construction, Orga-*

nization, and General Arrangements of Hospitals for the Insane. This text was the source document for the development of the Kirkbride Plan, an ideal architectural model for centralized public mental hospitals that every state in the country by the late 1800s utilized in the construction of their own hospitals, including the 1865 Texas State Lunatic Asylum and the 1865 Texas Deaf and Dumb Asylum in Austin.[13] Psychiatrists at the time theorized that these types of large institutional hospitals could cure mental illness through the very nature of their isolated and idealized environments. Mental health historian Gerald Grob describes this attitude:

> Mid-nineteenth century Americans believed in the redemptive ability of institutions to alter and shape human behavior in socially and ethically desirable ways. Institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons, and asylums were intended to serve as patent-office models of the good society; all required appropriate physical structures and rules of governance if they were to serve their proper function.[14]

While veterans' homes were not admittedly attempting to "alter and shape human behavior" in the same manner as the asylums, they still were involved in the same larger social project: creating the ideal model society. Americans felt a "sacred duty" to care for their wounded and infirm soldiers, to provide for them "no matter how much it cost...practically everything within the bounds of reason for the happiness and comfort of the veteran."[15] The provision of social welfare for those who are in need or are deserving places

[13]Sitton, *Life at the Texas State Lunatic Asylum, 1857-1997* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999.): 3-35..

[14]Grob, *The Mad Among Us* (New York: Free Press, 1994): 71.

[15]Rosenburg, 75

veterans' home among other eleemosynary institutions of the time; before they established the homes, many veterans were living in facilities that also held the mentally ill, the poor, and the elderly. This association led their founders to take influence from the public asylum model. However, the founders were responding to the increasingly negative perception of asylums at the time. In 1873, the National Asylum changed its name to the National Home, reflecting this growing stigma.

R.B. Rosenburg writes that the mission of both northern and southern veterans' homes "was to provide a viable alternative to what many considered a substandard and demoralized institutional care system for aged, infirm, and poor men. Almshouses, pauper farms, insane asylums, hospitals, and in some cases, jails were to be replaced by a new institution that better suited the veteran's needs and special status."[16] Soon after the end of the Civil War the Kirkbride model for state hospitals had begun to show its shortcomings, especially due to overpopulation. A large majority of the hospital patients also appeared to be chronic cases and not curable even within the confines of the hospital's supposedly therapeutic environment. Hospital administrators had started questioning the usefulness of the centralized congregate plan Kirkbride championed and many began to discuss alternatives, such as ideas for a more decentralized organization of smaller cottages spread out around the site and the creation of smaller localized hospitals in addition to the centralized state hospital.

Since the end of the Civil War, numerous state veterans home had begun as a response to the perceived inadequacies of the federal homes and

[16]Rosenburg, 73

state mental hospitals. Many of them, especially the southern homes, had developed their sites with elements of both the centralized and cottage plans. The Robert E. Lee Camp in Virginia, the Falkner Soldiers' Home in Alabama, the Georgia Soldiers' Home, and the Texas Confederate Home for Men all attempted to realize such plans, to varying degrees of success. The founders of the Georgia home explained that a decentralized cottage plan allowed for the institution of meaningful employment for the veterans, an important aspect of the management of the home which allowed the veterans to maintain a sense of self-esteem. The founders of the Georgia home, who were in close contact with those at both the Virginia home and the Texas home, at first had even proposed a plans for a "large farming cooperative of 3,000 acres, divided into ten-acre plots for each veteran and his family" and plans for a "'Confederate Co-operative Industrial Home,' [where] veterans and their families would work at manufacturing clothing, shoes, baskets, or canned fruits."[17] Though these plans did not materialize as such, they did influence the growth of the home into a self-contained community where veterans participated in a variety of light work and maintenance tasks around the complex.

At the center of the Gateway Apartments a group of buildings surround a grassy courtyard. The landscaping, however, seems unfinished. A mound of what seems to be leftover fill dirt and a few forgotten scraps from some long-finished construction project are all that occupy the courtyard now. These items prohibit anyone from using the space, though at the north end there is a laundry room that is still in use. An enclosed children's playground also sits just around the corner from this area. The courtyard seems under renovation,

[17]Rosenburg, 74, 76

Figure 2.5: The main interior courtyard of the Gateway Apartment complex

but the grass and weeds have grown over the dirt mound and over the un-used junk laying around, suggesting otherwise. The courtyard space itself, however, is of a scale that can make for a good outdoor space and a wonderful center of life for the apartment complex, if it were usable.

The use of the term "co-operative" by the founders of the Georgia home (in particular Governor John Gordon) is significant. The co-operative movement was part of a larger social reform experiment undertaken in the United States by followers of socialist philosopher Robert Owen at the early to mid-1800s. Owenites, in addition to other religious and secular communitarian groups such as the Shakers and Fourierists (following the writings of Charles Fourier) had begun experimenting in the creation of autonomous communities around the country. Many of these were vocal critiques of the processes of industrialization occurring in major cities of the Northeast US and western Europe. At the same time, reformist religious groups such as the Quakers were actively involved in the critique of slavery, prison institutions, and the treatment of the poor and mentally ill.[18]

The development of the asylum movement in the mid-1800s took directly influence from the Friends' Asylum in Pennsylvania founded in 1813; Thomas Kirkbride, a Quaker, had been a resident physician here until becoming superintendent of the new Pennsylvania Hospital for the Insane. Dorthea Dix, one of the most important voices in promoting the reformation of mental health facilities in the mid-1800s, had visited England in 1836 where she became involved with the asylum reform movement led by numerous Quaker

[18]Grob, 23-77

organizations, especially William Tuke and the pioneering York Retreat asylum founded in 1792.

The public asylum reformation in the United States, along with the general social reformation movements around the country from the beginning to the middle of the nineteenth century, sought to develop alternative models for the organization of society. Eleemosynary institutions such as asylums and veterans' homes provided convenient opportunities. Not only did the architectural programs of these facilities call for the large scale organization of hundreds of residents and employees in isolated state-funded enclaves, but the ultimate goal of this organization was social purification, whether for therapeutic purposes or, in the case of the veterans' homes, for the purpose of "shield[ing] veterans from the tempestuous 'outer world,'" to instill in these inmates the moral values expected of a proper Confederate veteran; that is, the moral values that the administrators felt were lacking in their larger society.[19] Inmates, as the Home called them, were prohibited from drinking alcohol, smoking, cursing, fighting, and spending time in town. The Home expected them to be active and working members, as their health allowed. The model veteran was in fact a model of the ideal ethical man. In a increasingly industrial, urban, alienating, and, for them, problematic society, the isolation and control afforded in this environment allowed the administrators, as social engineers on an urban scale, to experiment with the forced recreation of what they idealized as the pre-industrial, antebellum, small town society that had completely disintegrated in the previous 50 years.

Founders of the state asylums were opposed to a curatorial system that indefinitely housed chronic patients because these institutions did not rec-

[19]Rosenburg, 75

ognize that all mental illnesses could be treated given a properly controlled environment. The curatorial approach undermined the attempt of these orthodox administrators to create and sustain their concept of a moral society. In the orthodox state asylum, the model resident was a moral and civilized man, and they relied on the concept of the curability of mental illness to justify the desire to impose these social ideals onto their patients. Similarly, the administrators of the veterans' homes relied on the ideals embodied in the concept of the "proper soldier" to justify the imposition of strict order and discipline on the home's residents.

Near the central courtyard there is a community center building which is in regular use. This building acts as the center of public life for the complex. Residents reserve the building almost every weekend for events. The building at first appears as another apartment building since it has the same overall scale and is clad in brick. However, the brick walls are old; patched mortar joints vary in color throughout the wall, the brick is chipped and worn and numerous metal pieces of unknown function are still mounted in the wall. The building is in fact a remnant of the veterans home and state hospital complex; it was the power plant for the facility. The walls are composed of load-bearing brick, visible inside and out, and the floor and roof are concrete. The University rehabilitated the interior of the building in 1971, which included replacing all the windows and doors, but they left most of the interior space open from floor to ceiling. The taller half of the building, though, is now an open two story area with a seating area upstairs. The downstairs area contains a small kitchen and space for meetings of various types. This building is the most intact relic on the complex, with most of it dating to 1920, but unless the viewer is aware of

Figure 2.6: The Gateway Apartment complex community building, and former power plant

this fact it is not apparent when visiting the building.

By 1920, the Home had reached its peak population of almost 450 veterans. Earlier in decade the Texas Legislature launched a series of investigations at the Confederate Home in response to complaints. Reports from 1917 and 1919 found unsanitary conditions, unmaintained buildings and grounds, substantial insect infestations, employee negligence and abuse, and a widespread lack of responsibility among the administrative staff regarding finances and management.[20] A stressful political atmosphere at the time contributed to these inquiries, especially the U.S. entry into World War I and the 1917 impeachment of Texas Governor James Ferguson. Before 1920 the governor appointed a board of managers to administer each state institution, which in many cases resulted in a high turnover rate as different political parties came and lost power at the state level. In effort to reduce the power of the governor and clean up the administration of the state hospitals and schools, the State consolidated all eleemosynary institutions under the direction of a newly created Board of Control in 1920. With the newly formed management, the Home constructed a new brick hospital and steam-heat power plant, both of which were enlarged in 1926, possibly because the population had started declining rapidly due to old age. By 1943 there remained only 7 patients in the entire complex with only the hospital building and the administration building left functioning as the Confederate Home.[21]

A report of the facilities conducted in 1941 by the Board of Control

[20]Rosenburg, 126

[21]State of Texas,*Journal of the House of Representatives of the Regular Session of the Forty-Eighth Legislature Begun and Held at the City of Austin January 12, 1943* (Austin: 1943), 207

stated that all of the unused structures had deteriorated greatly and the state should consider rehabilitating them for non-veteran elderly. Though there were several arguments against this idea, especially from confederate organizations who wanted to see the home turned into a museum, the rising overpopulation of the surrounding state hospitals forced the Board of Control to use the Home to relieve these population pressures. In 1943 the state legislature passed a bill to allow the transfer of elderly men to the home from other hospitals. Among the arguments for accepting non-veterans was the claim that though these men were not soldiers during the war they had survived through Reconstruction, and that this was just as deserving of honor. The Home felt compelled to continue outlining what it saw as its ideal patient, so as to justify its continued demand for moral perfection from its patients. By 1945 the population increased back to over four hundred men and by the 1960s had reached over eight hundred. [22]

A large group of landscape features also remains in the northwest corner of the complex. Here a series of five stone retaining walls break up a steep slope. Several sets of old stairs allow passage up through these walls and around old oak trees. The landscape maintenance crew keeps the grounds well groomed around this whole collection. One set of three steps uselessly rises off the ground up to nothing, though it is well preserved with its own set of handrails. None of these stone remnants give any hint that they were part of any habitable structures; they all appear as historic landscape elements, as marks on the ground. Other than the old power plant building, all traces of

[22]State of Texas,*Journal of the House of Representatives of the Regular Session of the Forty-Ninth Legislature Begun and Held at the City of Austin January 9, 1945* (Austin: 1945), 225

Figure 2.7: A group of old stone retaining walls at the back of the Gateway Apartment complex

the former buildings during the era of the veterans home and state hospital are gone. The former hospital complex extended up to Tenth Street, so similar old landscaping elements also exist up in the wooded un-redeveloped areas north beyond the rear boundary of the apartment complex, north of the Infant-Parent Center.

The creek running along the west side of the property isolates this area from the surrounding neighborhood. At the north end, the creek and its surrounding woods act in a similar manner. To the east, the topography forms a gully along the property edge, acting as a buffer to the apartment complex on the other side. At the south edge near the entrance, signage and fences line the street sidewalk and the closest building is set back at least 200 feet from this line. Both the topography and the planning of the site over time have consistently reinforced its insular nature.

Changes in society after World War II had a profound effect on the state hospital system. Principally, there was a definite shift from a centralized hospital system to a reliance on numerous local health centers around the state. Many of the state hospitals had become overcrowded and were becoming the subject of an increasing number of critical investigative reports. When the politically progressive Texas Governor Allan Shivers took office in 1949 he initiated a new series of inquiries into the conditions of Board of Control institutions, and arranged for the publication of numerous critical articles in dozens of newspapers and journals around the state. By the end of 1949, his new administration abolished the Board of Control and reorganized the department as the Board for Texas State Hospitals and Special Schools. This department attempted to reform mental health operations within the central-

ized state hospital system, but during the 1950s numerous state and federal investigations of centralized state hospital systems concluded with an overwhelming recommendation for the de-institutionalization public health care facilities. Once the federal government had passed funding bills for the development of these de-institutionalized health centers in 1963, the state in 1965 subsequently re-organized the Board for State Hospitals and Special Schools into the Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation. This new organization facilitated the funding of local health centers and effectively disassembled the entire centralized hospital structure. The elderly men's home, still known at the time as the old Confederate Men's Home, was part of this whole process and provided numerous examples of deteriorating conditions and overpopulation.[23]

When in 1964 the State Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation transferred the property to the Austin State Hospital, the then 80 year old Confederate Home for Men was officially closed as such and renamed the Austin State Hospital Annex. Senate Bill 666 of the 61st Texas Legislature, passed in May 1969, transferred the property "referred to as the 'old confederate home'" to the University of Texas Board of Regents. The property at this time had already undergone an initial demolition, the debris of

[23]Grob, 191-222; Sitton, 132-155; "Firetraps for Seniles," *Texas Observer*, February, 28 1959: 1; In 1959, the then up-and-coming liberal politics magazine Texas Observer, based in Austin, published this front page article on the home. The article portrays a population of 770 "psychotic" inmates locked up in an outdated and decaying complex of buildings all dating supposedly before 1920, the "most modern" of which being a hospital building with "an open elevator shaft from the first to the third floors through which fire...could spread to the whole building in an instant." The celebrated documentary photographer Russell Lee provided images for the article, capturing pathetic moments of senility: old men staring at the floor, crouched in the corner, looking out windows onto the 26 acres of inaccessible grounds; the lack of enough staff prevented the hospital from allowing the patients from leaving the buildings, according to the article.

which, apparently, had been mostly left on the site. All but two buildings had been demolished, including the flagship administration building. The hospital however had decided to leave the old power plant and the central laundry building intact. The University later rehabilited these structures into community buildings for the apartment complex they built on the site in 1972. In the 1980s the laundry building was demolished for parking; only the old power plant still exists today.

• • •

After the University demolished the hospital structures in 1970, they followed the land use patterns that the old confederate home started in 1887: patterns of isolation, insularity, and autonomy from the larger urban fabric. Though the arrangement of existing infrastructure guides many decisions regarding new construction, the University certainly was aware of this when agreeing to acquire the site. For them, the insular siting of a former veterans' home fit the needs of a student housing complex. The fact that the same site was deemed proper for a confederate veterans home, a state-run nursing home, and a married student housing complex illustrates a common acceptance, if not desire, for urban isolation. Within this context, changes in local politics and collective memories throughout the twentieth century have glorified a relatively consistent housing development into a monument to the Confederacy, a symbol of the post-war argument against social control, and an environment for the transitioning of young married couples into adult life.

Chapter 3

Web-Based Historical Information Design

Given the problem of interpreting significant yet demolished historic sites, in which the potential for on-site intervention is limited, we can turn to web-based solutions to reconstruct these built environments. On-line "environments" are simply dynamic and interactive organizations of information, and thus a product of information design, a field in which architects work quite regularly; a central task of architecture firms is to provide information about proposed and actual built environments through various visual rendering methods. Architects, however, generally utilize on-line environments not to communicate information about buildings, but rather to illustrate their own company and its services. This is an underutilization of web design's potential as an medium for communicating architectural ideas.

The nature of web design as purely an information space, as a representational or rendered space, gives it potential to act as an interpretive medium for the needs of historic preservation. In this sense, web design can provide a medium for the communication of information about, say, a building or a landscape, so as to interpret the historical value for those interested in learning about a particular place or culture. The problem of communicating this information effectively is a matter for design.

Designers and architectural scholars, however, have written little on how we can use new architecture to interpret historic sites. The most provoca-

tive writing on the subject comes from Columbia professor Jorge Otero-Pailos's journal *Future Anterior*. Regarding the act of introducing new design into a particular context, he writes,

> Whereas [modernist historic preservation] believed the new was introduced into a pre-existing, invariant and stable context, [contemporary historic preservation] recognizes that the new produces shifting and ever expanding contexts of interpretation which transform the very core of the old. Methodologically this suggests that cutting edge historic preservation is the process of keeping the old 'open' for interpretation, and of holding out the possibility that its work is never finished; indeed cannot finish. [1]

For Otero-Pailos, the question of interpretation is one of method; it is an act which should to reveal its own incompleteness to the viewer and engage them in forming their own conclusions about the subject. It should be an act "that does not dictate historical meanings, but rather puts forth ideas for the public's critical review."[2] Though instead of purely representational interpretive design, e.g. through drawings and models, Otero-Pailos is fascinated with physical projects that act as interpretation, such as Venturi and Rauch's Franklin Court for "reintroduc[ing] subjectivity to preservation poetics as an aesthetic synthesis that knows itself to be inconclusive."[3] In this project, white painted steel columns and beams outline the only information known about the historic house: the basic size and shape. At this point, the design has become diagrammatic and acts purely as an three-dimensional information graphic. Once architecture becomes an interpretive medium, it becomes information

[1] Otero-Pailos, "The Contemporary Stamp of Incompleteness" *Future Anterior* 1, no. 2 (2004): vi.

[2] Williams, "Reaching a Global Public" *Future Anterior* 2, no. 1 (2005): xi.

[3] Otero-Pailos, "Preservation's Anonymous Lament" *Future Anterior* 4, no. 2 (2007): iii.

design, and thus an exploration of interpretation's potential must include a study of all the media through which it can act. Web design lends itself well to interpretation because it implies that it is incomplete through the fact that it can and is always changing.

For the second half of this project, I explore the use of web design as a medium for the interpretation of a demolished historic site. In the first half, I explore how information design can illustrate place and time through both static printed examples and dynamic web-based examples. In the latter half, I propose a series of web-based interpretive designs to illustrate the subject I explore in Chapter One.

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Information graphic designers regularly present data illustrating how places change over time. Generally, they do so with planimetric maps containing layers of graphic information that superimpose onto one another according to the location they describe. The viewer identifies specific points corresponding to physical places and reads the information layered with that point. The combination of layers over a particular location can tell a story about that place. To illustrate change over time, the various layers may show the same topic of information, e.g. building footprints, with each layer differing with respect to specific time periods through a particular aspect of the topic changes. For example in the sketch of a graphic from Jörg Kirschenmann's *Residential Districts*, two layers illustrate the changes that occurred with the construction of the Avenue de l'Opera in Paris (see Figure 3.1). One layer, in a lighter pen weight and poché, outlines the footprints of buildings affected by the new

boulevard, and a second layer, in a heavier pen weight, outlines the footprints of the building blocks that define the new street. Their superimposition tells a story of large scale demolition, social upheaval, and changing cultural values with regard to urban scale and form.[4]

In Charles Joseph Minard's famous 1861 infographic *Losses of the French Army in the Russian Campaign 1812-1813*, he illustrates the Russian countryside by describing the movement of people over time, telling a story of devastating loss in a harsh climate (see Figure 3.2).[5] Like the Kirschenmann diagram, Minard selects a particular information topic, the French army, and shows how aspects such as their size and location change over a certain period of time. However, contrary to the Kirschenmann diagram, and because Minard's topic changes in relation to its physical movement, he relies on a linear illustration, where movement across the page represents a change in both time and place, like a timeline combined with a flow map. Kirschenmann, because his topic changes while remaining physically stationary, relies on superimposition, where a difference in representation between the layers (pen weight, color, etc.) represents the change in time.

Superimposition with geographic and historical data, however, can become illegible if the information set is too large or too complex. A solution at this point is to separate the layers out into a series of consecutive illustrations. Edward Tufte calls this format "small multiples." He writes that they "resemble the frames of a movie: a series of graphics, showing the same combination of variables, indexed by changes in another variable...The design

[4]Kirschenmann, *Residential Districts* (New York : Whitney Library of Design, 1980): 41

[5]Tutfe, *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information* (Cheshire, Conn. : Graphics Press, 1983): 40

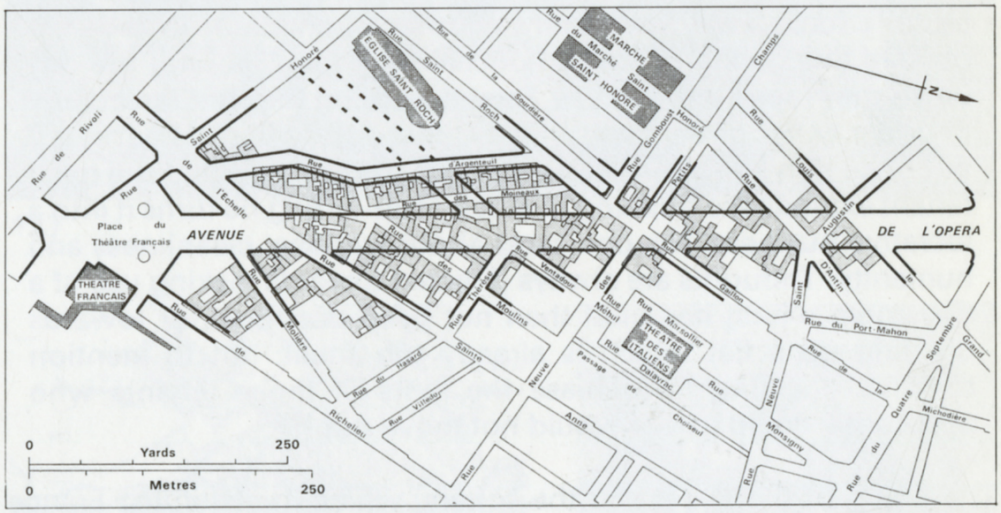

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Figure 3.1: A page from *Residential Districts* by Jörg Kirschenmann showing his use of superimposition in a diagram of the creation of the Avenue de l'Opera.

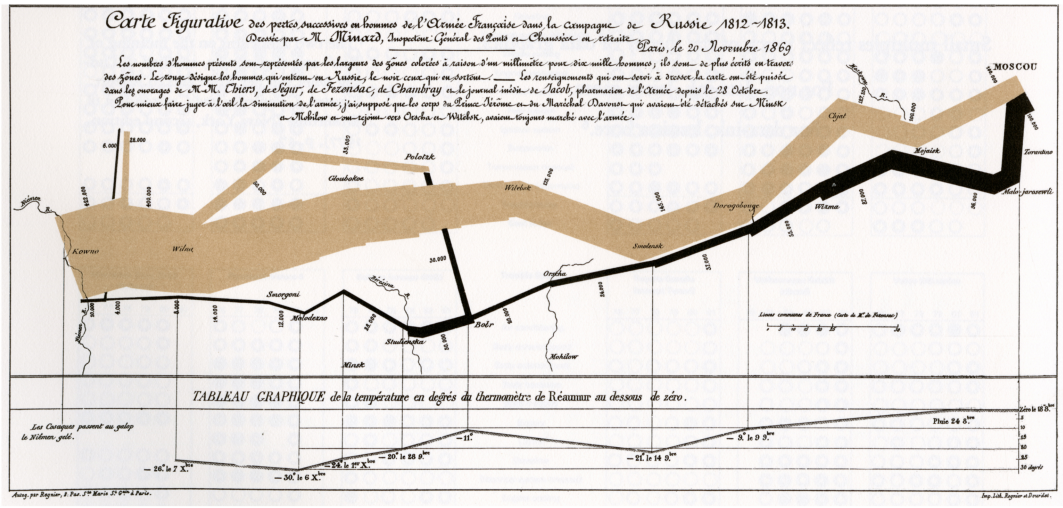

Figure 3.2: *Losses of the French Army in the Russian Campaign 1812-1813* (1861) by Charles Joseph Minard.

remains constant through all the frames, so that attention is devoted entirely to shifts in the data."[6] Edmund Bacon utilizes the small multiple extensively and effectively in *Design of Cities*.[7] In the example sketch of his illustration of St. Petersburg's development history, there is consistency in the level of detail, in the selection of elements which do and do not change, and in the use of shade. Building and street elements tell a story of either their appearance, disappearance or alteration through time, superimposed over the consistency of the river's shape (see Figure 3.3).

As graphic depictions of place move into on-line media, the amount of information accessible to the user increases due to the ability to have multiple graphics hyper-linked together. The most successful on-line infographics superimpose small multiples by allowing for users to manually switch between the different graphics. The effect is a sort of user-controlled animation. This adds the elements of flow and movement to graphics which can further act to convey information.

One the most prolific producers of on-line infographics is the New York Times Graphics Department, who have consistently developed numerous excellent data-rich interactive diagrams for the New York Times web site about issues ranging from election results to census statistics to cultural topics such as film and music trends. Their graphics are innovative in their ability to elegantly display large sets of data with the use of intuitive interfaces. In Figure 3.4, a screenshot of their graphic for the 2010 national midterm elections, users have access to numerous sets of data (Column labelled "Filter Map By") such as voting results per income level, per ethnicity, and other demographics, that

[6]Tutfe, 170

[7]Bacon, *Design of Cities* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1967): xx

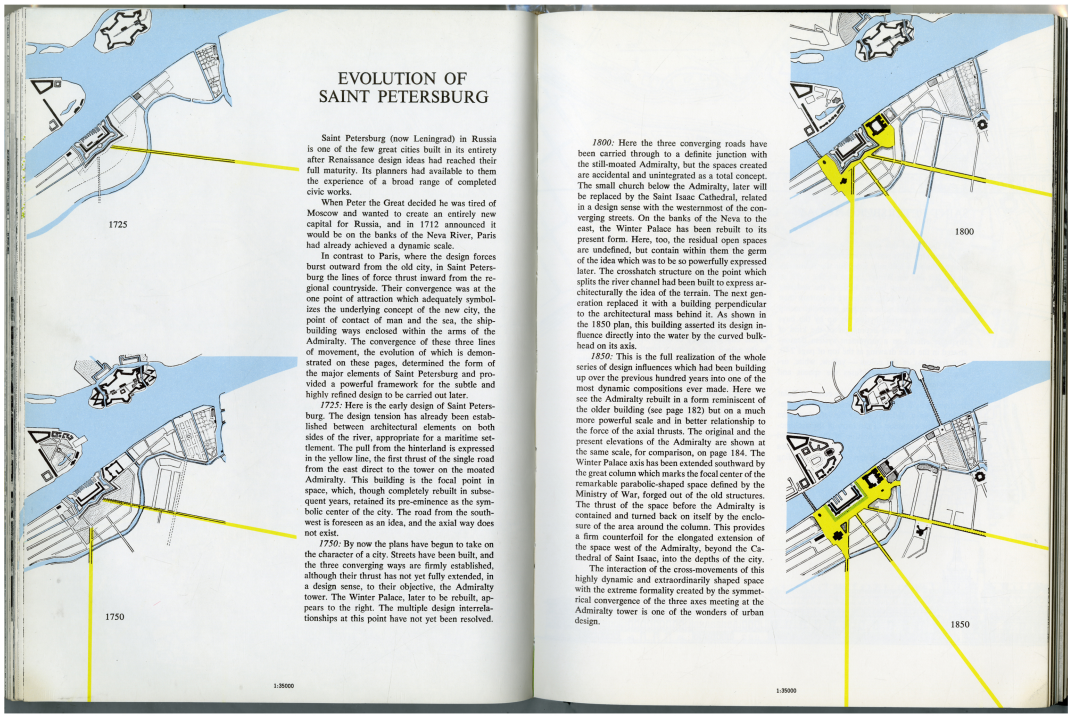

Figure 3.3: A page from *Design of Cities* by Francis Bacon showing his use of small multiples in a diagram of the development of St. Petersberg.

can display through the center map graphic. In this examples, the map is divided into congressional districts that illustrate the voting results with color fills. The data sets accessible to the user further alter the map by filtering districts according to the customizable data set levels. In the example, the data set selected is Median Income, and the data set level, controllable with a slider bar interface above the map, is set to show only the districts where the median income is between 23,270 and 40,075. The user can control the slider to show any available range of income, and thus develop conclusions about the relationship between income levels, political preferences, and geographic location. Such a large amount of data could only be displayed using a customizable interface without creating a separate small multiple for every possible data combination.

Though most of the graphics from the New York Times illustrate current issues and recent trends, occasionally they illustrate and map historical information. In Figure 3.5 a map illustrates the largest foreign-born populations of each county in the United States using color fill. Above the map is a slider bar that allows the user to show the same data type for different census years. The change in data between years illustrates how immigrant populations have increased and decreased in size through history. Because the map uses census data as far back as 1880, the user can also view how federal definitions of ethnic and racial groups for census purposes changes over time as well. The slider bar timeline interface allows an intuitive control over the display of superimposed small multiples that illustrate historical information about a place.

The capabilities of web-based interactive graphics have also led several historical organizations to tackle the ambitious goal of comprehensive urban

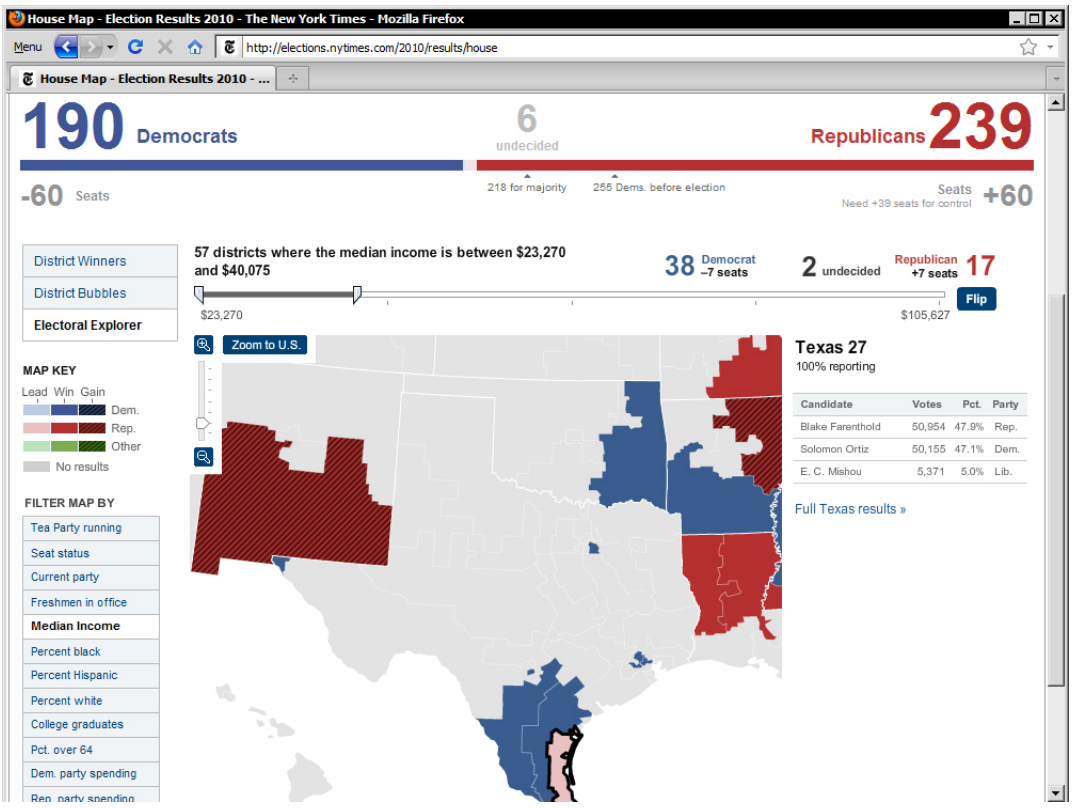

Figure 3.4: Screenshot of a New York Times graphic "House Map Election Results 2010"

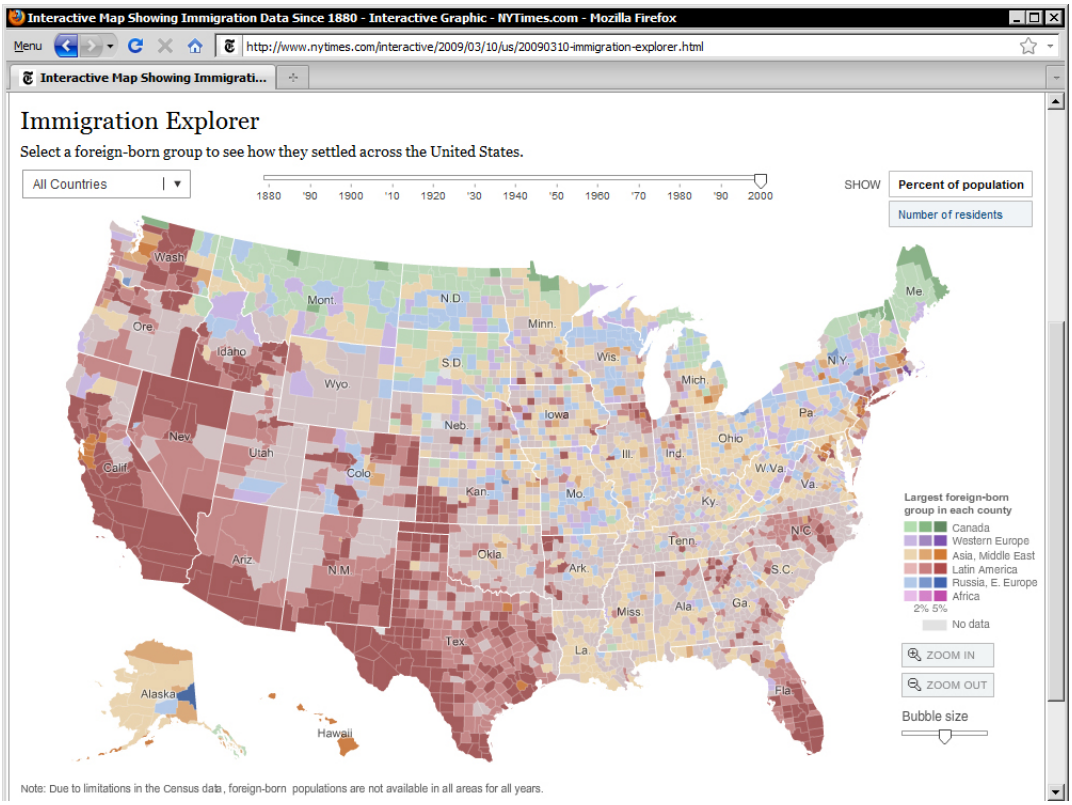

Figure 3.5: Screenshot of a New York Times graphic "Interactive Map showing Immigration Data Since 1880"

landscape interpretation, from stretches of roadway development to large city districts. The following websites reflect the most well-designed displays of historical place-based information, though they also provide constructive examples of incomplete concepts and an inability to take full advantage of the medium.

Place Matters, `http://placematters.net/`, is a web-based project of City Lore, a cultural heritage advocacy non-profit focused on utilizing methods of oral history, folklore, and cultural anthropology within the setting of New York City. Place Matters is mainly a user-contributed "census of places that matter," where visitors to the site may "nominate" a site important to them by filling out an on-line form. The collection of sites is browsable through labels such as neighborhood, cultural theme, typology, etc. There is little in the way of information design in this listing; they are simply short narratives from anonymous authors, sometimes with an accompanying un-sourced image. The listings do not link to each other in any organic way, though there are special "virtual tours" that City Lore and others have composed around certain places or cultural themes. The most ambitious of these is an interactive Flash-based graphic describing the history of the Bowery in Manhattan entitled "Marking Time on the Bowery: Selected Places in the Bowery's Unique Journey" (Figure 3.6). The graphic introduces viewers to a map of the Bowery from Cooper Square north to Chatham Square. Along the street are about two dozen red dots locating particular sites that the graphic illustrates. These include the former sites of CBGB, the original Five Spot, the Bouwerie Lane Theatre, and various unique shops, organizations and residential rowhouses, many of which still exist today. Clicking on each dot pops open a frame that contains a short historical narrative with the authors name on one side and a gallery

of un-sourced historic and current images on the other. Occasionally locations have a link to play an embedded video excerpt from the documentary film *Slumming It: Myth and Culture on the Bowery*. A tabbing menu at the top links to selected books, films and websites, and a list of production credits.

The graphic concept of "Marking Time on the Bowery" creates some limitations for itself, however. There are several dots which do not refer to an actual address but rather sites like the former El train, a linear structure, and common typologies like the typical 19th c. rowhouses that make up the urban fabric of the area. These remain labelled as red dots located in specific locations. The dots could easily work better as actual graphic depictions of the site or object, such as their outline in plan, so as to take advantage of the map format's capabilities. The dot labelling format also illustrates a larger conceptual problem: the history of the Bowery is not solely the history individual locations, but rather the history of how these sites contributed to the experience of the street and the cultural meaning of the street to those who inhabited it over time. The most provocative stories in "Marking Time" are in fact the non-specific dots which refer to the El, or the rowhouse fabric, or the historic flophouses because they describe phenomenal aspects such as emotion, sense, and more of a "what it was like" understanding of place-based history.[8] "Marking Time" would do well to begin graphically linking individual sites together with larger themes related to the life of the street itself. Most promising is the possibility of thematically mapping the user-contributed census because then historical depictions of places can accumulate and organize organically

[8]The article on the Bowery El train begins with a quote from *Impressions and Experiences* by William Dean Howells in 1896: "'No experience of noise can enable you to conceive of the furious din that bursts upon the sense, when at some corner two cars encounter on the parallel tracks below, while two trains roar and shriek and hiss on the rails overhead...'"

and dynamically resulting in a history which is unexpected and provocative.

In "Curating the City: Wilshire Blvd.," `http://www.curatingthecity.org/`, a project of the Los Angeles Conservancy, many similar issues arise. The user views a map of Wilshire Blvd, an historic arterial road between downtown Los Angeles and Santa Monica, along which are dozens of points indexing the location of important historic sites (Figure 3.7). The site breaks the boulevard down into eight districts and the user can zoom into each district to access links to each individual site's description. The descriptions are similar to "Marking Time:" a short narrative, a photo gallery, and various data fields such as style and architect. Also similar to the Bowery example, many specific points identify non-specifc features and typologies of the boulevard, such as lamp-posts and early motels. The site does provide overviews of the eight different districts it identifies, but this separation is too artificial and leaves one, like "Marking Time," without a comprehensive sense of place, only a sense of individual components. There simply is not enough information available, nor are there enough connections and informative, organic flows between components to generate this level of experiential understanding.

"Curating the City" and "Marking Time" illustrate the most common solutions to organizing historical place-based information on-line. They are map-and-point solutions, much like the GIS method of displaying data, and though it is a necessary component of on-line interpretation, the potential of web-based media goes well beyond planimetric depictions, and should include other basic information graphic types such as charts, tables, lists, arrays of images, and components that group these features in meta-charts and tables.

The most useful and underutilized capability of web design is the ability to connect large amounts of organized information together using interactive

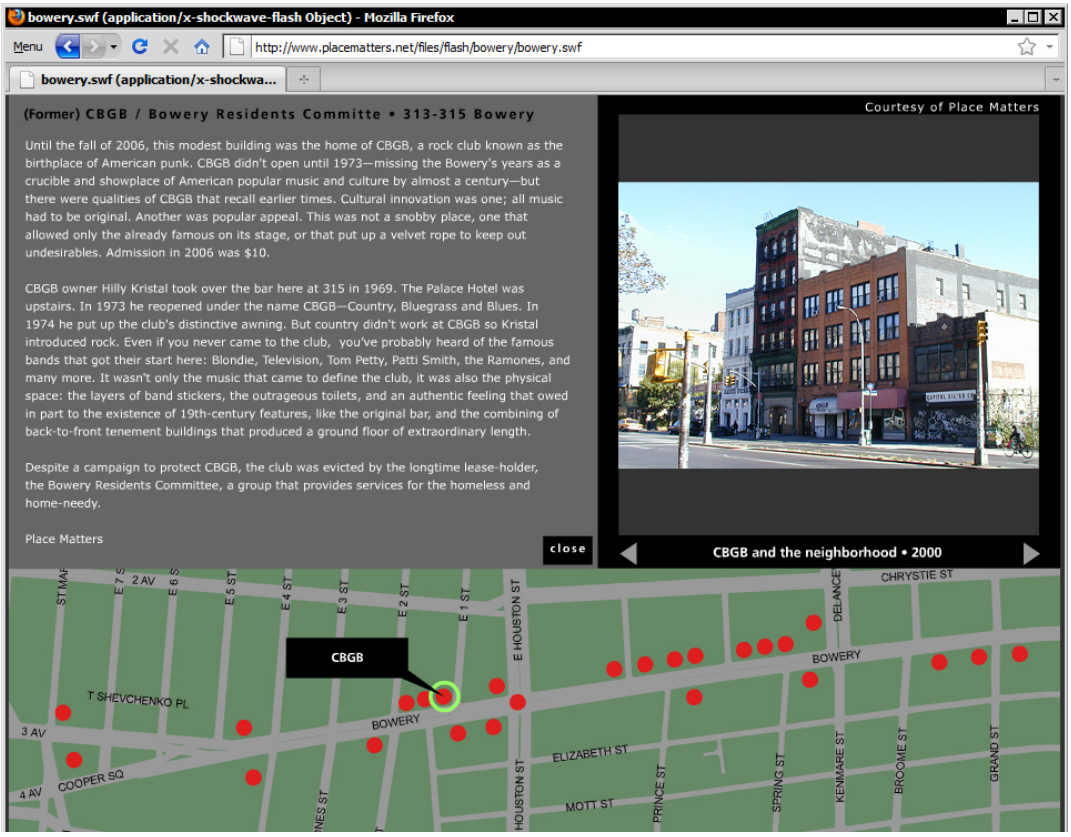

Figure 3.6: Screenshot from "Marking Time on the Bowery"

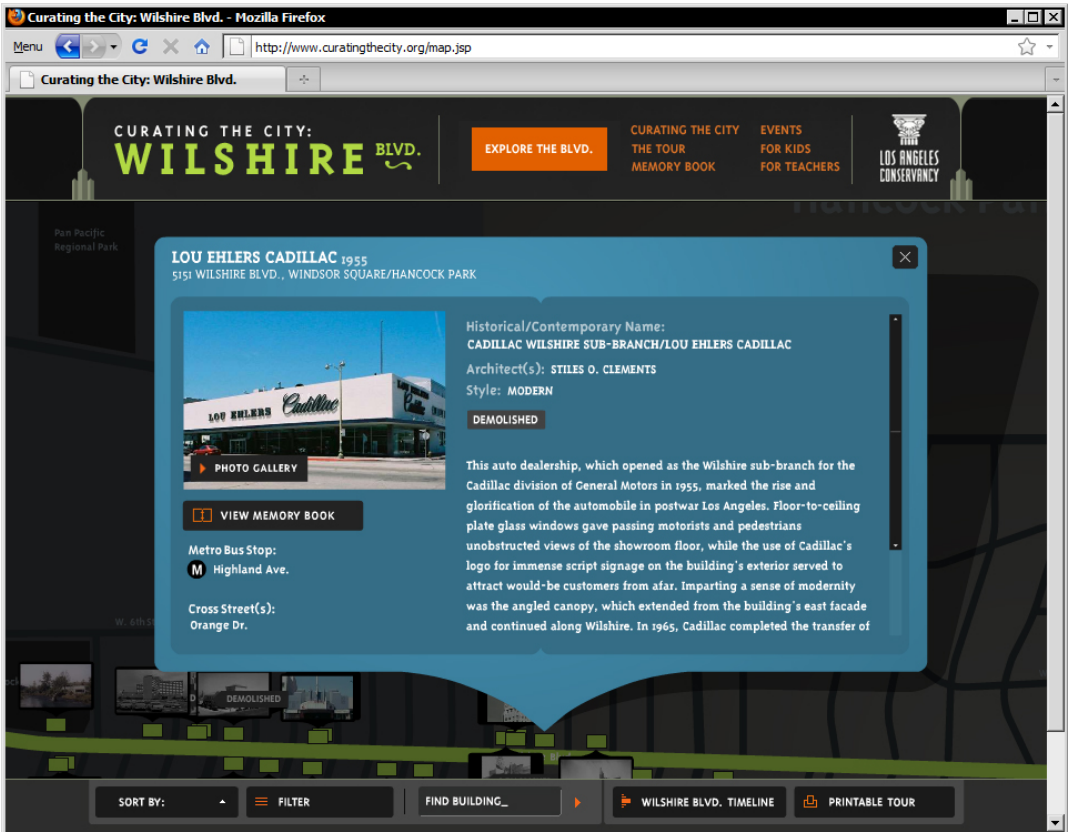

Figure 3.7: Screenshot from "Curating the City

interfaces that themselves provide information about the data to and from which they are moving. For instance, the two previous examples utilize a simple and literal *informative flow* by rapidly panning across the map as the user switches from one site or neighborhood to another. This provides easy and intuitive information about relative location of sites as the user browses.

Web interactivity also has the potential to provide an *incomplete* interpretation by allowing users to display custom arrangements of information. The previous examples did utilize interactivity, but they created a closed, fixed, and *complete* interpretive experience in the sense that they do not allow a true customization of data presentation; all user moves have been predicted, and thus, all interpretations of the places are fixed and closed. An incomplete interpretive system allows for the creation of new interpretations. It does not try to predict all possible user experiences of data and allows for an infinite or at least a very large number of possible custom data configurations so as to enable users to produce new interpretations of a place.

In order to do this, data providers must aggregate as large a bank of information as possible, by hosting it themselves and by connecting to other networks of databases. Customizable data aggregation must be designed with a modular interface to allow users to switch on and off individual pieces of data, groups of data, and meta-data. The density of data must be thick. Users must be able to view several information types or groups at a time and on the same plane. The previous web-based examples show too much non-informative map graphic and explain specific elements with pop-up windows that are not coplanar with the map; this information should be shown along side the map and concurrently with the display of the map. Layered, "light-box", pop-up, and other non-planar methods of introducing new groups of

information discourages users from synthesising data into new interpretations by experientially controlling the user's focus. Interpretive synthesis requires user to be able to display data together, in the same plane, so that they can literally see everything at once.

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From here we can begin to think about design. In the latter half of this chapter, I propose a series of web-based interactive diagrams illustrating the principal historical significances of the site through the arrangement of statistical and narrative data. The process for developing these diagrams begins with the identification of two initial sets of information: 1) the principal historical significances that the diagrams will illustrate, and 2) the available statistical data sets that, when combined diagrammatically, will help illustrate the identified significances. From this, a series of initial static diagrams can explore several possible combinations of data. These sketch diagrams can then illustrate potentials for dynamic user interactivity when the static presentation of data becomes too complex, or when two diagrams contain possibilities for interlinking, e.g. a chart-based diagram that references geographic data can link, through a user interface, to a map-based diagram which explores the geographic data further, and vice-versa. Rather than developing a strict linear narrative, I am proposing to simply curate the presentation of data, allowing the user to infer meaning through the context and juxtaposition of these facts.

The following historical significances are principal to the site currently occupied by the University of Texas Gateway Apartments: 1) The historic development of the site throughout the 20th century illustrates how changing local politics and collective memories can glorify a public housing development

which has typologically changed very little over time from a living monument to the Lost Cause of the Confederacy, to a symbol of the post-war liberal argument against social control and traditional forms of governance, to an idealized environment for the transitioning of young married couples into adult life. 2) The fact that the same site was deemed proper for a confederate veterans home, a state-run nursing home, and a married student housing complex illustrates two important typological similarities between these land uses: a) their common desire for urban isolation, stemming from their own critiques of society, and, furthermore, b) their common historical ancestry to 19th century social utopianism.

The following data sets when plotted over time are useful for illustrating the identified historical significances: resident population, use, ownership/management, topography, location and use of other sites in Austin with similar topography, number of buildings on site, location of buildings, construction dates of buildings, architects of buildings, architectural details of buildings, development of surrounding neighborhoods, infrastructure development in and around property, political atmosphere (local, state, national), and data more specific to the site such as significant events directly affecting the site, dates of investigations of the facility, dates of newspaper and magazine articles published about the property, locations of other 19th century veterans' homes and mental hospitals around the country, and dates of construction and operation for other 19th century veterans' homes and mental hospitals around the country.

Figure 3.8 is an initial graphic illustrating the connections between population and use of the site with managerial and political changes occurring locally at the time. There are six sets of data plotted to each year from 1880

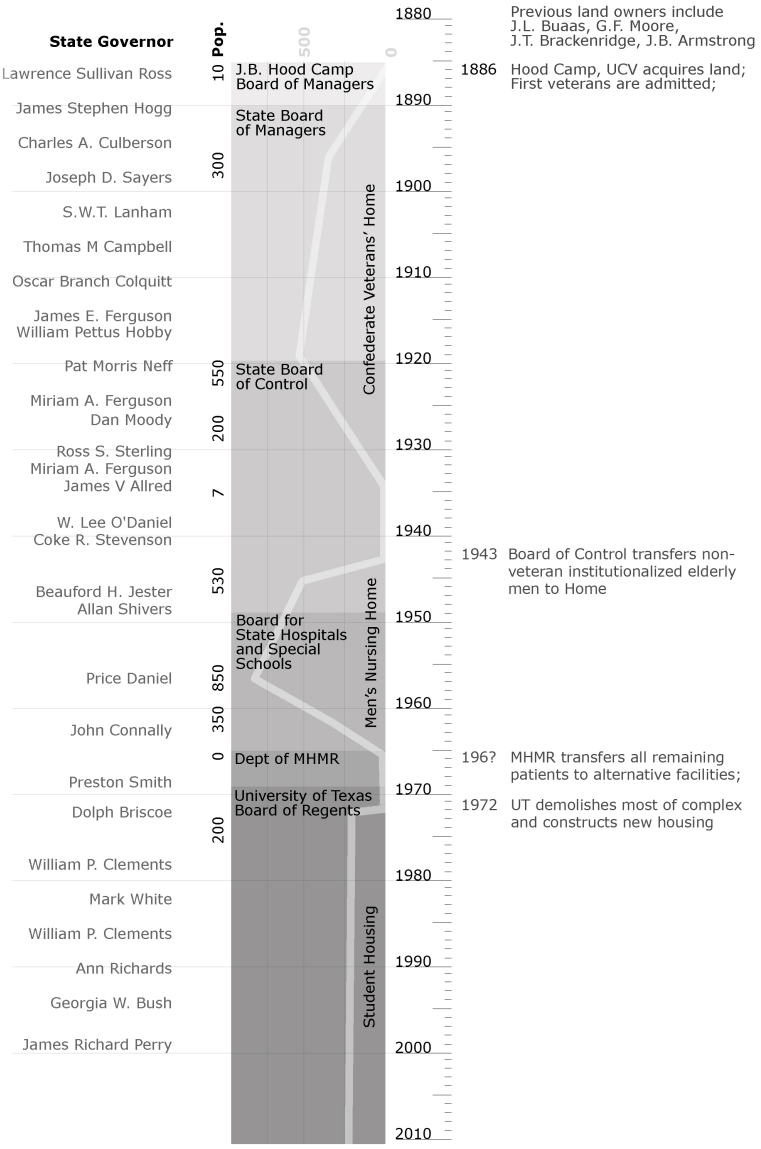

Figure 3.8: History of the Site Currently Occupied by the University of Texas Gateway Apartments in terms of Population, Management, State Governorship, and Significant Events.

to 2010: resident population, the names of the site's managers, the length of time each manager controlled the site, the names of state governors holding office, the length of their stay in office, and significant events directly affecting the site. The central graphic is a vertically-oriented line graph of resident population over time superimposed over a grayscale block graph illustrating property managers over time. Just to the left of the graphic are the known population numbers that drive the line graph. To the left of this are the names of Texas governors over time. The bottom of their names align with the year that they took office from the previous governor. To the right of the vertical time line are various significant events that help to illustrate the central messages of the diagram.

The peaks in population illustrate the three different eras of the site: the confederate veterans' home, the men's nursing home, and the student housing complex. Though the official name of the site remained the Confederate Home for Men until 1972, there was in fact a substantial break from the use of the home as a veterans' facility to its use as a general men's nursing home, a fact that the population data illustrates best. Because there were a fixed number of confederate veterans in Texas, the confederate population curve naturally declined over time until there were only seven veterans remaining at the home by the beginning of World War II. The graphic shows that the beginning of this decline coincided with the re-organization of the home's management under the Board of Control, hinting that the new management also possibly affected the declining population.

The graphic shows that in 1943 the state began admitting non-veteran elderly men. Because there will always be a steady supply of elderly men in Texas, the diagram shows that managerial and political factors played a role

in shaping the population curve during this era of the site. The coinciding of the site's nursing home era with the election of Govs. Jester, Shivers, and Daniel illustrates this; the rise in liberal American politics in the mid-to-late 1950s spurred numerous critical investigations into the operation of these state hospitals and homes, leading to a national trend of de-institutionalization and the re-organization of state mental health care agencies. Though the graphic does not spell this out exactly, it implies this and asks the viewer to do more research on their own. Other points of change in the population and use of the site, including the changes in the late 1910s, coincide with political changes that one can similarly research further by understanding the policies of the governors at the time.

This next graphic, Figure 3.9, builds upon the timeline-population graphic developed in the first example. To the right of the timeline are three site plans from the three different eras of the site. Two of the site plans are altered Sanborn maps, and the most recent map is GIS data from the City of Austin. These maps help to illustrate the continuity of the site's form over time. To enhance this significance, circles highlight notable elements of the site that remain continuous through time. A line connects the circles to a description of the buildings changing uses. Note that there is no regard for whether a noted building has changed form or remained the same over time. Only its position on the site determines its continuity. Thus, the church building is listed as continuous with the current Infant-Parent Center building. This forces a reading of the site's history in terms of overall landscape form and pattern, which highlights the site's continuity, and thus illustrates the site's continuing isolation from the urban fabric of the surrounding neighborhood.

The fact that there cannot be a label for every continuous building

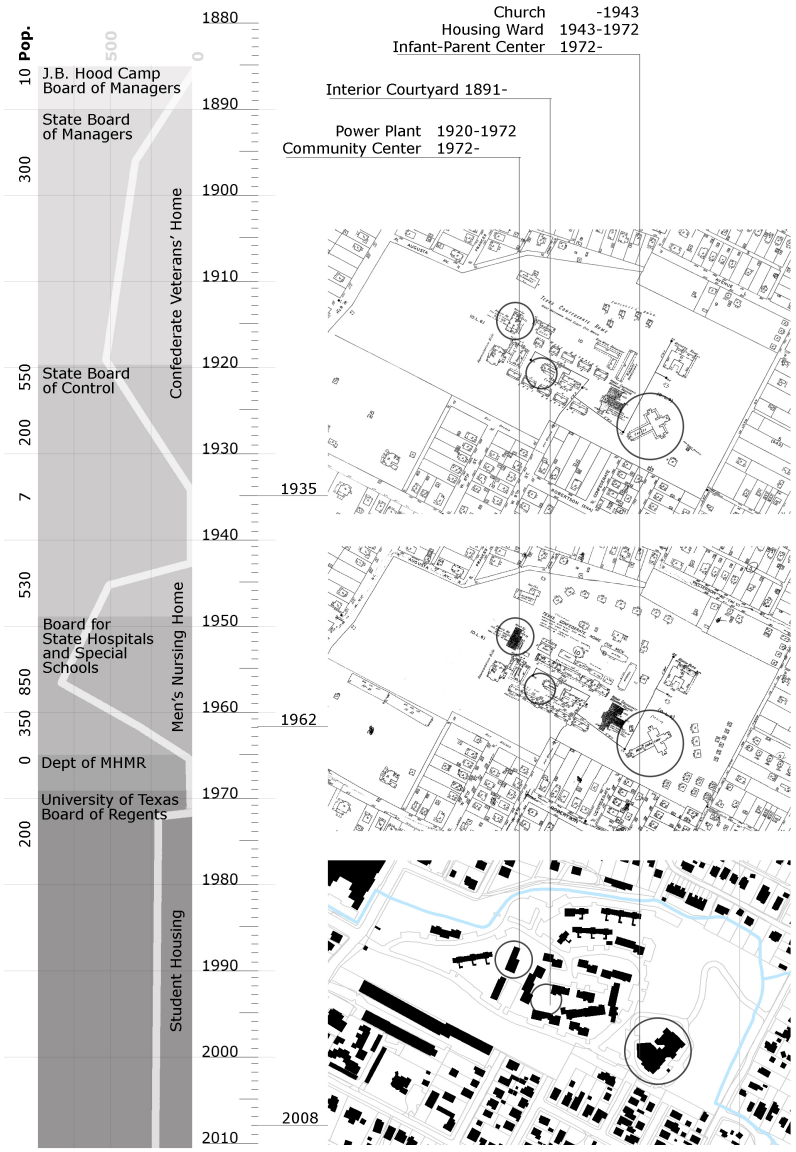

Figure 3.9: History of the Site Currently Occupied by the University of Texas Gateway Apartments in terms of Population, Management, Building Locations, and Urban Context.

on the site suggests an interactive solution, where one could select buildings one-by-one to view their identification and whether they are continuous. Also, because the first graphic and the second graphic share the timeline-population element, the two diagrams could link to one another via some visual switching interface.

To think about more generic solutions for dynamic and customizable interfaces, it is helpful to consider the possibility of including other types of data formats such as narrative text alongside the previous graphic diagrams. So far we have only seen how the user can interact with the map diagram, but combining this with text, photographs, and other map types allows new possibilities for interaction and the manipulation of data.

In Figure 3.10 a navigation sidebar frames the previous timeline-map graphic. The navigation allows the user to change the data sets and formats and to browse to other properties. The data sets menu allows the user to select and deselect any or all of the available sets for a particular format. The user can alter the timeline to show, say, population, names, uses, occupants, etc., and alter the maps to show buildings, topography, use, construction type, etc. The example also shows how the user can select a particular building on the map and view information about its continuity over time and its use and relevant dates.

Figure 3.11 illustrates the ability to switch data formats from timeline to narrative while retaining the map format. The narrative block contains a menu of chapters, ranging from those specific to the site to generally related topics. Below the main body of text are the source notes. The narrative is also directly editable via a wiki interface. In Figure 3.12, the narrative block now displays next to the photograph block. At this point there are no available

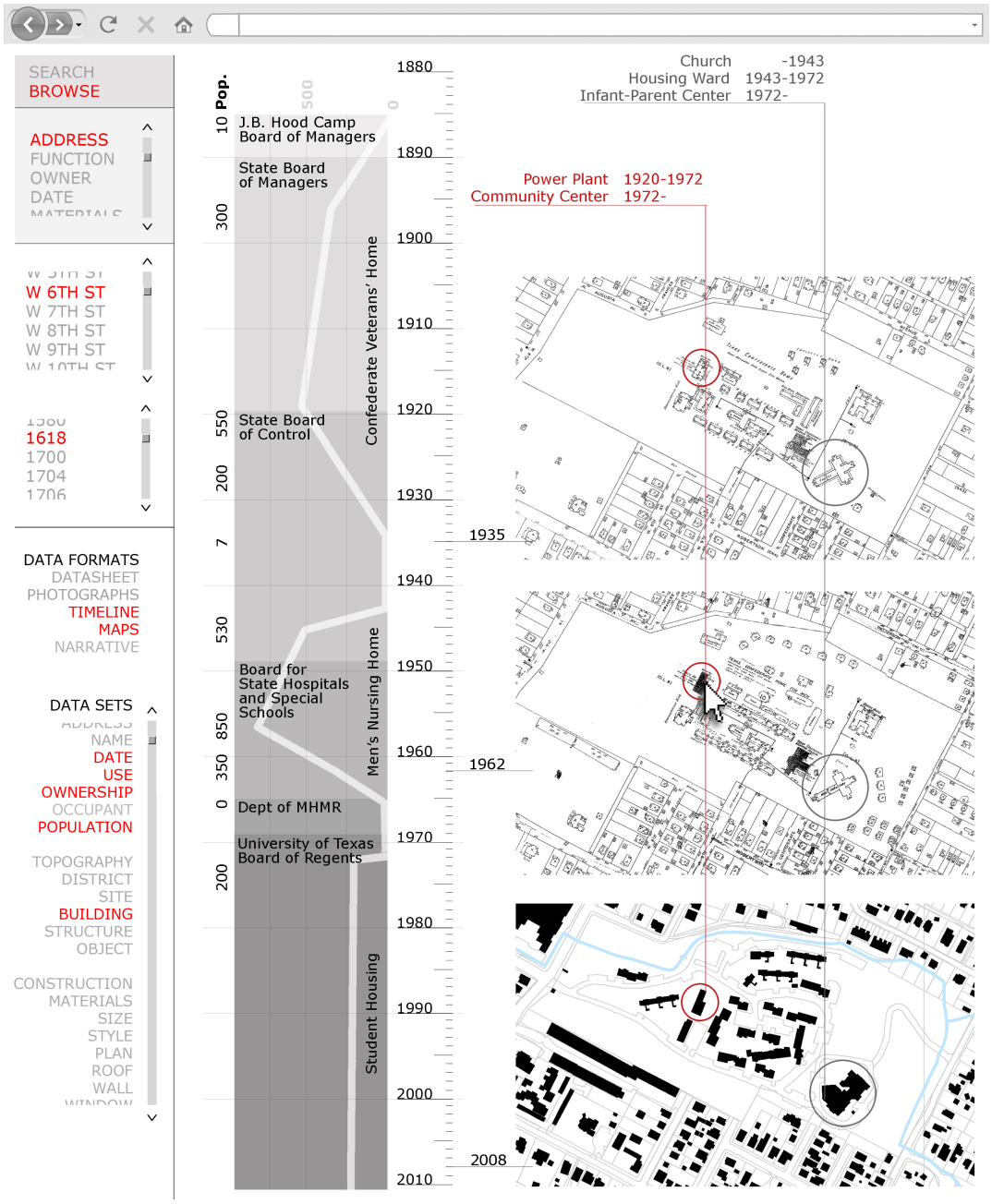

Figure 3.10: Illustration of Proposed Interface Design including the Display of Timeline and Map Data Formats

data sets since they apply only to the charts and maps. Here, the user can view and add photos, as well as view photo meta-data via a mouse-over hover interface.

Figure 3.13, as the culmination of the previous examples, illustrates the potential for an extensive interaction between the two displayed graphics, in this case between the timeline and a zoom-able GIS-style map. After selecting the property, data formats, and data sets, the user can refine the map graphic further by selecting elements of data directly from the timeline. In this example the user has selected 'State Board of Control' from the 'Ownership' data set. This illustrates on the map all the properties under this same ownership within the selected map scale. Since the Board of Control in Texas only existed from 1920 to 1949 the time period automatically sets to this 29 year span. However, the user may control a slider bar parallel to the timeline in order to include more than these dates, and by extension more than only this ownership element. In the example, the user can view all the properties in downtown Austin owned by the State Board of Control from 1920 to 1949. From here the user may select a different property from the map, or change ownership type, or zoom in and out to reveal more properties.

There are four key aspects of this design that set it apart from previous attempts at web-based interpretation: 1) a fully customizable display of data in which the user is given control over exactly what combinations of data are visible, 2) a densely organized aggregation of many data sets available for display with simple select boxes, 3) the ability to view multiple data formats at once, and 4) the provision that every piece of data links to a display of other relevant data, so as to provide for a seamless ability to effortlessly wander through the database. With these principles in place, the internet, as an

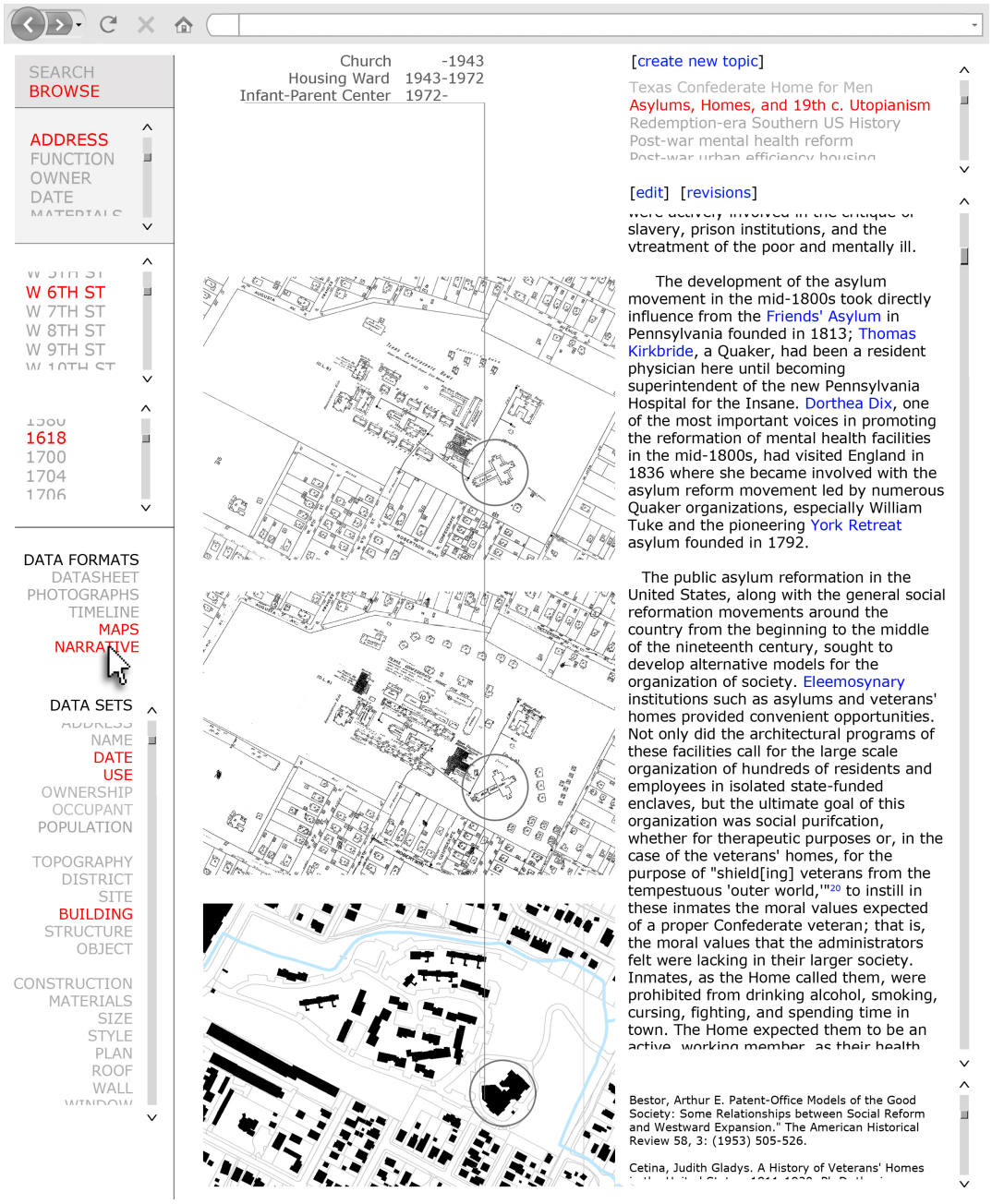

Figure 3.11: Illustration of Proposed Interface Design including the Display of Map and Narrative Data Formats

Figure 3.12: Illustration of Proposed Interface Design including the Display of Narrative and Image Data Formats

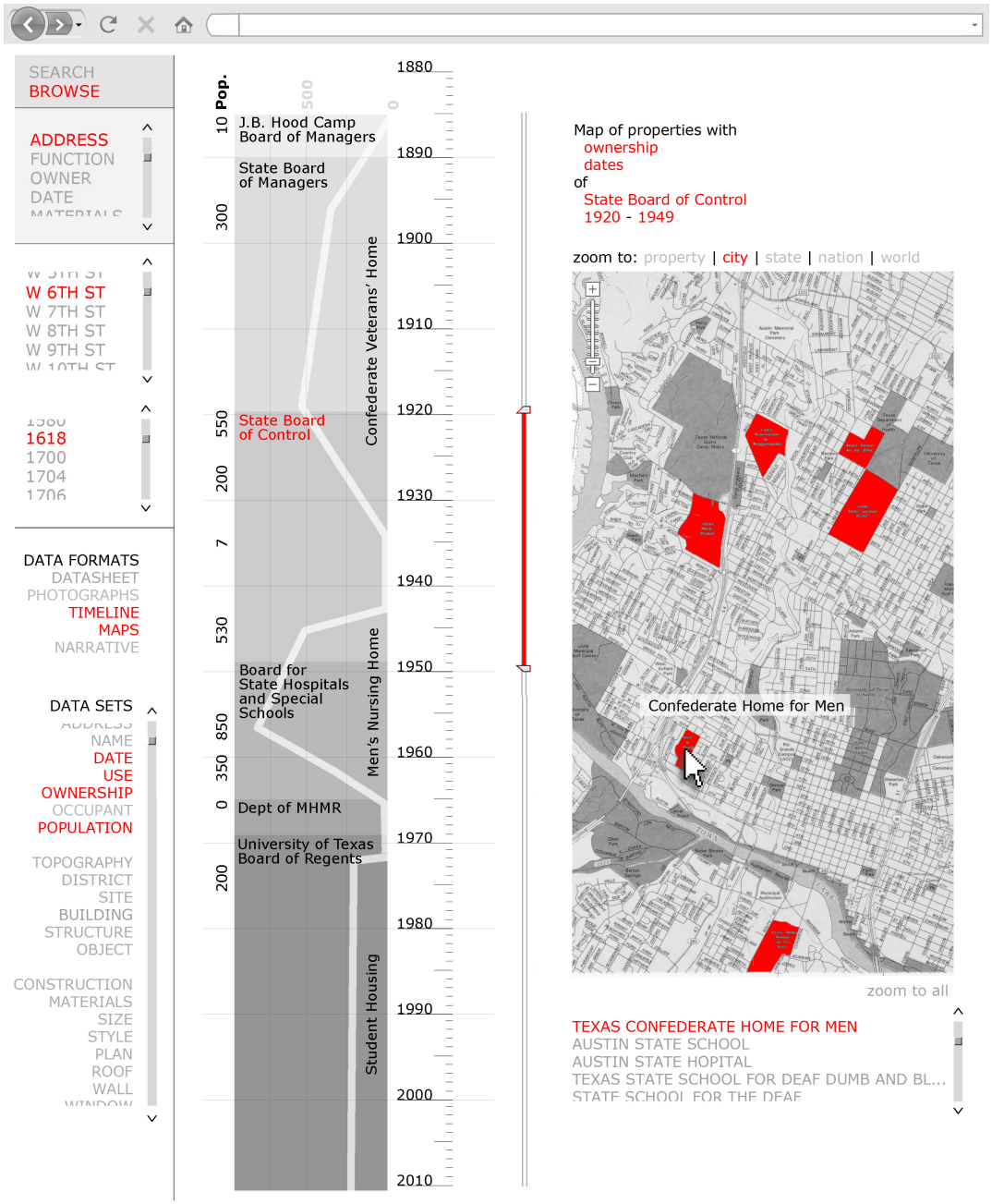

Figure 3.13: Illustration of Proposed Interface Design including the Display of Timeline and Zoom-able Map Data Formats

open, incomplete, and dynamic medium, can provide access to information that allows for new interpretations of historic places.

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Central to this exploration is a debate of curation versus non-curation regarding the interpretation of historical data. In one sense this design is highly curated. It depends on an extensive amount of research by a dedicated historian. This historian selects sets of data from various sources that they deem worthy of display. For this project, I selected the data sets that best illustrated the significance of the site I arrived at through my own research. In another sense the design is also highly un-curated. Though the selection of data is purposeful, it is displayed to users largely in a raw form, as pure data and meta-data. It is not synthesized solely into written narrative or any other form of highly processed interpretation, though these forms are included, but merely as another piece of data along side references to other narratives written about this place. In this design the significance of the site, which drove the selection of data, is not made directly clear to the users. In doing so the design provides a kind of gap between information and significance that the users must bridge on their own. It is likely that users may arrive at the same conclusion as I did, but it is also possible that they might develop their own conclusions about the meaning of a particular place. It is in this sense that the design allows for an interpretive incompleteness.

This design explores the possibility for a hybrid of curated and non-curated approaches to the organization of data. An un-curated extreme of this system is the example of a wiki-style, un-moderated, user-contributed, on-line database. In this system, users can search and browse for properties by field

and also contribute missing data. Thus effectively they can curate their own interpretation. This extreme can be limiting since it requires that the database make guesses about the type and format of data that it will accept before any specific research is conducted. The data types must then only be generic types common to all properties in order to provide for advanced querying and organization. The new design challenges this by proposing a bottom-up method of generating database entries. Research on particular properties occurs before the creation of the database, so the researcher develops data types and formats specific to the significance of the property. However, this technique alone results in a fragmented and un-queryable database since the fields are not controlled across properties. In order to obtain an open system that allows for new interpretations of data yet still provides a platform for more rigorous historical research, the design attempts to bridge the need for an open database with the benefits of a curated approach.

A curated extreme is the example of the conventional interpretive center where visitors are removed completely from the historic site and presented with a series of highly curated images and text as substitute. With this approach the presentation of data can be controlled to illustrate complex significances that might not otherwise be apparent to visitors of historic sites or to viewers of un-curated on-line databases of information. The major problem with this method is that important interpretations of history can get lost if they are not within the scope of those conducting the research. This new design addresses this problem by attempting to fit curated research into a customizable database interface where historical significances are presented along side the raw data and sources so as to provoke the viewer to form their own conclusions about the accuracy and completeness of the interpretation.

Part of the solution to the problem of including unique datasets and pre-curated interpretations into an open database system, for the purpose of scaling the system upward, is to allow for the controlled creation of new data formats, such as the complex timeline example. In the new design, historians can create these diagrams and allow users to include them along side the display of conventional data fields. A user can then view raw un-curated data in one frame alongside curated information in another, such as a narrative or a diagram illustrating a specific significance. This could exists as a kind of "advanced mode" of user contribution, specifically designed to allow historians to create and present their own interpretations of a single place alongside one another. The user can then view these static interpretations critically; they can choose to accept them, expand on them with available datasets, or create their own interpretations and datasets.

The ability for this new system to incorporate both raw un-curated data and curated interpretation can expand further to hook into existing external projects, such as the interpretive website examples mentioned earlier and physical interpretive programs located on historic sites around the world. These external projects might connect with a simple link to a website or through a summary of their program, interpretive scope, and data sources. The power of this new system is in its ability to frame these existing interpretations, both on the web and in the built environment, so as to allow users to view them as part of an incomplete overall interpretive project to which they can also contribute. As a result, the interpretation of place becomes a more democratic process and the meanings we associate with our built environment can more easily evolve through time.

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Vita

Joshua Morris Conrad was born in Sellersville, Pennsylvania on 09 June 1982, the son of John and Ruth Conrad. He received a Bachelor of Science degree in Architecture from the Georgia Institute of Technology in 2004. Afterwards, he worked for an architecture firm in New York City until enrolling at the University of Texas at Austin School of Architecture in 2006. He is receiving a Master of Architecture in addition to a Master of Science in Historic Preservation.

Permanent address: 805 1/2 West 16th Street
Austin, Texas 78701

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